

LITERATURE CIRCLES

For all content areas

- A classroom organizational strategy for interacting with text.
- A motivational tool for finding pleasure and learning in books.
- A way to build independent learning styles and skills.
- An extension of the Cooperative Learning theory model (through the use of typical roles).

Typical Roles

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| • Discussion Director | (Keeps focus on key questions.) |
| • Illustrator | (Focus on visualizing from text/illustrations.) |
| • Connector | (Making personal connections to what is known.) |
| • Word Whiz | (Vocabulary, word choice, sentence fluency, etc.) |
| • Evidence Finder | (Keeps going back to the text to find facts.) |
| • Website Locator | (Going beyond the text to find more information.) |
| • Summarizer | (Main ideas gathered; answers to key questions.) |
| • Feedback Evaluator | (Process and product review; observations.) |

These roles must be modeled, demonstrated and practiced before we can expect students to use them independently. Ultimately, however, we hope to “wean” students off of the role sheets, so that they can respond naturally and independently to their reading and to what others are saying about the reading.

Role sheets can be changed or adapted to help focus attention on a specific strategy or aspect of text, a specific skill or piece of content you want to emphasize, or an instructional standard you are teaching.

They may also be used to reinforce strategies that have been previously taught. If you have taught your students to visualize as they read or to monitor their own comprehension by self-questioning, the strategy may be practiced and reinforced by role sheets in the literature circle.

If you are focusing on a particular genre or style of writing in the text, role sheets can help draw attention to the unique characteristics of that form: For example, a “mapmaker” role for stories that involve a journey, or a “math minder” role for text involving calculations, or a “people watcher” role for biographies, or a “clues coordinator” role for mystery books.

LITERATURE CIRCLES . . . For all content areas

- Read a chapter or section of the text, an article, or any piece of writing.
- The whole class can all read the same text.
- The class can read a variety of texts and divide into groups to discuss same text or different text.
- Use “sticky notes,” “codes,” and/or “colored highlighters” to mark the text as you read. (See explanations below.)
- Divide into literature circles to:
 - Share reactions to the text/clear up misconceptions.
 - Make personal connections to the text.
 - Develop interpretations and in-depth analysis of the text.
 - Answer key questions.
 - Gain insight into the author’s craft (style).

Using colors and codes for marking text for later discussion:

Have available “sticky notes” and/or “colored highlighters” for students to mark the text as they read.

Students will enjoy tabbing and/or marking interesting places in their reading. They may want to mark points of confusion, connections made outside of the text, new and interesting use of words, as well as main ideas and new information.

Students may go tab-crazy or color-crazy until the novelty wears off and the reading itself takes precedence. (GOOD TIP: Limit the number of sticky notes each student receives at first. Invite each student to tab four points of interest in any day’s reading assignment and you will generate more than enough issues for discussion in literature circle.)

Establish a common coding system to teach students to use sticky notes/codes/highlighters effectively as a comprehension strategy. Start with three or four codes. More and different codes may be added later as appropriate to the particular text.

- YELLOW (√) - main idea statements/answers to leading questions
- PINK (!) - new, unique, different, interesting information
- GREEN (?) - point of confusion, or “I wonder?”
- BLUE (►) - interesting word choice or concept phrase

Eventually, the students will begin to select their own codes and aspects of the text to note for the discussion groups. The important thing is to teach and model.

PLANNING A LITERATURE CIRCLE

ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

- What to read?
One text/ multi texts/thematic grouping/student choice/negotiated choice?
- What purpose?
Why do it?
What do you want for your students?
- What connection?
Never in isolation/A part of a whole/Readers' workshop/Thematic unit
- What format?
What model?
Time considerations.
Grouping considerations.
- What support?
What pre-teaching of skills, strategies, etc. need to be addressed?
- What response?
What form?
Teacher directed?
How much independence?
- What to assess?
When?
What?
How?

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LITERATURE CIRCLES

GOAL: To get students to read and respond to literature.

“It is critical for students to discuss what they have read to develop the ability to construct meaning.”

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER:

- Literature Circles fit with Readers’ Workshop and Literacy Block of Time
- Literature Circles can replace your normal one tradebook cycle (3 weeks)
- Discussion time should be around 20-30 minutes
- Number of students should be about 5 or 6
- Begin slowly, teach the rules first, model, practice, then try Literature Circles
- Do not kill the discussion by demanding too many extension activities. Let them talk.
- May wish to begin concept with one book, then expand to multiple texts
- Teacher must have read all books being discussed
- Introduction for students on open-ended questions and how to respond will help prior to Literature Circles
- Can begin one Literature Circle at a time rather than have all going at the same time

LITERATURE CIRCLES

Small groups of students read the same book.

Each child in the group agrees to complete a particular amount of reading.

Each child takes a turn leading the group discussions.

Students come to the literature circle meetings with notes in their reading journals about the selection they have read.

The circles meet on a regular basis and discussion roles rotate among the students.

Each group shares a book summary with the rest of the class through presentations.

All students turn in reading journals/logs to the teacher so that their progress can be assessed.

Grouping Students for Literature Circles:

The groups consist of a heterogeneous mix of students who have a choice of novel as their common bond.

The students preview different books that range in ability and theme, and they write down their top three choices.

The students can be divided into groups of four or five.

THE TEACHER'S ROLE
(Literature Circles in the classroom)

FACILITATOR, ORGANIZER, MANAGER,
AND EVALUATOR

Teacher Tasks:

- Gather a selection of books
- Visit and observe literature circle groups
- Conference with students and groups
 - Keep discussions on task
 - Keep notes about student progress
- Test or quiz students on material as needed
- Create a sense of community among the group

THE STUDENT'S ROLE (Literature Circles)

Each student participates in his or her own group with daily responsibilities.

The reading log has four parts:

- Personal response to the book
 - Summary of main events
 - Key vocabulary words
- Key questions or predictions about the book

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES DURING LITERATURE CIRCLES:

- **Summarizer:** prepares a brief summary of the day's reading. The group discussion begins with the summarizer sharing the main highlights of the assigned reading which are written in his or her reading log.
- **Discussion Chairperson:** develops a list of questions that the group might discuss, keeps the group on task with the focus on discussing the "big ideas."
(Examples: What new things did you learn as a result of your reading? How did the book make you feel? What did the book make you feel like? What did you learn as you read this book? What didn't you understand?)
- **Illustrator:** draws a picture related to the reading to share during the group's presentation to the class.

SAMPLE PAGE:

SUMMARIZER

Name:

Book:

Assignment – pages: ____ to ____

Date of literature circle meeting: _____

Your job is to prepare a brief summary of today's reading. Your group discussion will start with your 1-2 minute statement that covers the key points, main highlights, and general idea of today's reading assignment.

Summary:

Key Points:

Assignment for the next circle meeting: pp. ____ to ____

SAMPLE PAGE:

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

Name:

Group:

Book:

Assignment – pages: ____ to ____

Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss. Your task is to help people talk about the “big ideas” and share their reactions. Usually the best questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read, which you can list below during or after you read the selection.

Possible questions or topics for today’s discussion:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Connections: What did today’s reading remind you of in your own life?

SAMPLE PAGE:

ILLUSTRATOR

Name:

Group:

Book:

Assignment – pages: ____ to ____

Your job is to draw a picture related to the reading – a sketch, cartoon, flow chart, or stick figure scene. It can be a character, the setting, an exciting part, or what you think will happen next. Make your drawing on this paper.

Connections: What did today's reading remind you of in your own life?

Assignment for tomorrow: pp. ____ to ____

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p. _____ to p. _____

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about the small details: your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read, which you can list below, during or after your reading. Or you may use some of the general questions below to develop topics for your group.

Possible discussion questions or topics for today:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Sample questions:

What was going through your mind while you read this?

How did you feel while reading this part of the book?

What was discussed in this section of the book?

Can someone summarize briefly?

Did today's reading remind you of any real life experiences?

What questions did you have when you finished this section?

Did anything in this section of the book surprise you?

What are the one or two most important ideas?

Predict some things you think will be talked about next.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

VOCABULARY ENRICHER

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p. _____ to p. _____

VOCABULARY ENRICHER: Your job is to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in today's reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them while you are reading, and then later jot down their definition, either from a dictionary or some other source. You may also run across familiar words that stand out somehow in the reading – words that are repeated a lot, used in an unusual way, or key to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words, too, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your circle meets, help members find and discuss these words.

Page No. & Paragraph	Word	Definition	Plan

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

LITERARY LUMINARY

Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p. _____ to p. _____

LITERARY LUMINARY: Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that your group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text. You decide which passages or paragraphs are worth hearing, and then jot plans for how they should be shared. You can read passages aloud yourself, ask someone else to read them, or have people read them silently and then discuss.

Location	Reason for Picking	Plan for Reading
Page _____ Paragraph _____		
Page _____ Paragraph _____		
Page _____ Paragraph _____		
Page _____ Paragraph _____		

Possible reasons for picking a passage to be shared:

Important

Informative

Surprising

Controversial

Funny

Well written

Confusing

Thought-provoking

Other:

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _____

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